

GEMOHING IN LAMAHOLOT OF EAST FLORES: THE FOUNDATION AND PILLAR OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION

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ABSTRACT

Gemohing is a local culture of the Lamaholot people. Gemohing has had a significant impact on the attainment of the ideals of mainstreaming religious moderation in Indonesia. This study aimed at exploring the expression of gemohing as the foundation and pillar of religious moderation for the people of East Flores. This study is qualitative, built upon primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected from observations on community participation. While the materials were directly gathered from the gemohing practice and interviews with 23 cultural figures and residents of the gemohing tradition. Secondary data were obtained from relevant preceding studies and two documentary films about the practice of gemohing. Both types of data were analyzed qualitatively-interpretatively. This study was conducted from September 2019 to July 2022 in the Larantuka, Adonara, and Solor. This study found that the Lamaholot community demonstrated gemohing as the foundation and pillar of building a shared life. The gemohing praxis which is based on the Lamaholot philosophy is reflected in the principles of ina tou ama ehang and puin taan tou gahan taan ehan. These principles mean that all Lamaholot people come from one mother and father and therefore the spirit of unity must be upheld. They mandate that every citizen views each other as brothers that need to be appreciated and respected with a spirit of unity in the social order and as an individual as well. From this point of view, unity and oneness are highly emphasized aspects. This study represents a contribution to efforts to promote religious moderation.

Keywords: *Gemohing; Religious Moderation; Local Culture*

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing realization of religious life and social harmony in Indonesia is being disrupted by several acts of extremism, radicalism, and fundamentalism. Some of them are the incident of vandalism of the Quran and the walls of Musala Darussalam at Kemis Market, Tangerang Regency on September 30, 2020 (Putra 2020), the Torpedo incident in Lemba Tongoa Village, Sigi Regency on November 27, 2020 (Mashabi 2020) and other incidents such as hate speech (Beryandhi 2020) and hate spin which leads to blasphemy and disturbance of harmony in

life. Such acts are not justified by religion and society because they threaten religious harmony and moderation in the context of Indonesia's pluralism.

These situations and actions need to be prevented so as not to cause division. One of the strategies to maintain national unity and harmony is to seek the realization of religious moderation by examining and strengthening the nation's cultural capital. In this context, we highlight *gemohing*, a local culture of the people of East Flores. This idea is reinforced by the CRCS which states that local culture is an entity that can bridge the management of diversity and become

an important part of efforts to create religious and social harmony in Indonesia (Ahnaf et al. 2015; Satha-Anand 2015; DiMase 2017; George 2017). Thus, local cultures play a significant role in realizing religious moderation in Indonesia as well as religious and social harmony.

In this case, the local culture is considered as the basis and pillar in actualizing religious moderation. Long before the idea of religious moderation occurs, the keywords in religious moderation, such as humanity, common good, fairness, patriotism, tolerance, no harassment, and respect for traditions, have been activated and developed in the local culture. Humanity, the common good, and mutual respect are significantly shown in the *gemohing* praxis. Therefore, the researchers intended to explore deeply how *gemohing* can be made as one of the bases and pillars of religious moderation.

This study was intended to highlight *gemohing*, the local culture of the community that plays a foundational role and becomes a pillar of building religious moderation. Accordingly, the following three questions are answered in this study. First, what is the form of expression of *gemohing* that the people of East Flores have practiced as the foundation and pillar of religious moderation? Second, what makes *gemohing* considered a pillar of religious moderation? Third, what are the implications of *gemohing* for the realization of religious moderation for the life of the nation and state?

This article proposes that the Lamaholot *gemohing* of East Flores has been practiced by the community long before religious moderation became the mainstream in Indonesia and a means to revive and strengthen the spirit of solidarity, unity, and oneness among the people. Therefore, *gemohing* also serves as the foundation and pillar in promoting and realizing religious moderation in Indonesia.

Literature Review

The existing literatures tended to portray local cultures as cultural wealth that played a role and functions to build human relations vertically and horizontally. Yoseph's study described the virtues and values of the life of the Lamaholot people of East Flores (Muda 2016). While Ramdhani's et al study found that the local culture of the Klunkung community in Bali affects the interdependence between the Muslims and the majority of Hindus in Bali (Ramdhani, Busro, and Wasik 2020). This is different from Pengasih and Rahman's study which showed that the sacred ritual activities of the Pandana Merdeka housing community are collective actions reflecting group solidarity and serves to integrate society in a moral order (Rahman and Pangasih 2020). Similarly, Bandur and Sihombing's study showed that the *likang telu* culture of the Manggarai ethnic group in NTT is the basis of harmonious relations between the Catholic and Muslim in Manggarai (Bandur and Sihombing 2022).

It is in line with the statement revealed by Fuad through his study conducted in Balun village. Fuad discovered that local wisdom is an element that constructs the peaceful culture among people in Balun. The forms of local wisdom as a basis for a peaceful culture among people in Balun Village are reflected in the sense of brotherhood, togetherness, respect, and appreciation when seeing their brothers or sisters feel happy. They perceive the religious difference as a good tradition that should be maintained (Fuad 2016).

Mila and Kolambani who conducted a study in Watu Asa village, Central Sumba, NTT, clarified the elements of local wisdom among people there. These elements are to maintain tolerance and harmony of the three different religious groups such as Christian, Moslem, and Merapu. The findings that promoted the idea of

local wisdom values for people in Watu Asa is regarded as the contra-narration of the intolerant ideologies (Mila and Kolambani 2020). The local wisdom of Klungkung people in Bali according to Ramdhani, et al., affected the interdependency between the Moslems and the Hindus in Bali and brought all religious believers to harmoniously join together (Ramdhani et al. 2020).

Maulana, et al., discussed the multi-religious people's participation in a rite called *Sujud Sumarah* (Maulana, Muttaqin, and Fitriyani 2021). Hia, et al., considered the *tolo-tolo* rite by Nias people in Fadorosifulubanua village could create social harmony from the values of mutual cooperation therein (Hia et al. 2021). Iswanto and Kawanggung showed *Moko* in Alor, NTT, as a symbol of harmony in life (Iswanto and Kawanggung 2021).

Upon deeper examination, these studies have not specifically linked and demonstrated the important position of local cultures as a key element in building religious moderation in the pluralistic Indonesian society. This study adds to the literature on the study of local cultures from the perspective of religious moderation by focusing on *gemohing*, the local culture of the people of East Flores in NTT. Numerous journalistic reports and personal reflections on *Gemohing* praxis in East Flores have been published in mass media, either printed or online. However, there is no a specific study discussing *Gemohing* associated with religious moderation. This study is meant to fill this empty space.

Meanwhile, some studies correlated between local wisdom and religious moderation. Haryanto demonstrated that Centong war tradition in Brebes contained significant values against religious moderation. For Haryanto, religious moderation values from this tradition include conflict resolution without any violation, social harmony shown by involved families,

cooperation, tolerance, and cultural conservation (Haryanto 2022).

Aksa and Nurhayati explained the cultural context and local wisdom of Donggo people in Bima becoming a basis for developing religious moderation. Based on their opinions, religious moderation of Donggo people in Bima is developed through identity and the rite of Raju culture. This rite is considered as binding to pluralist people's social cohesion in Donggo (Aksa and Nurhayati 2020).

In contrast to the study above, in this study, the researchers intended to show that *gemohing* becomes the media of collecting and bringing the public community with various religious backgrounds together for one humanity purpose. It is to help of reducing someone's workload which he/she could not do it. Thus *gemohing* can strengthen the public social cohesion directing to the harmony of living together through religious moderation.

This research focuses on local traditions in Java in response to pandemics in mitigation strategies. To analyze this problem, the theories of Medical Anthropology according to Lenore Manderson and the Anthropocene concept of Stephen Silvern became the main analytical tools. According to Silvern and Davis, the Anthropocene concept is a model of understanding the position of humans in a particular living space. This living space has a reciprocal relationship with humans. The position of humans affects the environment in which they live, but on the other hand, the space in which they live impacts human life itself (Silvern and Davis 2021). In this relationship, the value system becomes the primary reference. The value systems inherent in this relationship include religion, culture, and ethical norms (Conty 2021; Poveda 2020; Turner 2017). This value system provides the basis for the human perspective to anticipate, respond to, and

overcome the problems it faces (Ivakhiv 2019; Watling 2018; Wickman and Sherman 2020), including the diseases or outbreaks and how to treat them (Prescott and Logan 2019; Ray 2021).

Related to this view, Leonore Manderson positioned the Anthropocene concept against relationship patterns with the environment to anticipate and treat diseases. The cultural conditions and value systems inherent in them are one of the factors for responding to disease in addition to modern medicine. The model proposed by Manderson refers to Medical Anthropology that was developed earlier (Manderson et al. 2016). These analytical models will examine how local wisdom in Javanese traditions and some local traditions in Indonesia respond to pandemics in the closest context: the Covid-19 Pandemic and the rest of the other diseases. Furthermore, these models are also applied to analyze disease mitigation and treatment strategies based on local beliefs and traditions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study was conducted in a theoretical framework known as structural functionalism theory (Barnard 2004). It interprets people as a structure consisting of several parts that are associated with one another. This theory perceived people holistically related to the functions of their elements such as norms, customs, traditions, and institutions that existed in the community. Those functions lead to a stable and cohesive system.

In general, there are three important figures as the pioneers of this idea, namely August Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Herbert Spencer. It is admitted that structural functionalism ideology is strongly affected by an idea with biological perspectives that considers people as biological organisms consisting of some interdependent organs. Further, that dependency is an absolute requirement for the sustainability and the

survival of organisms (Barnard 2004). Comte began the process using the organic analogy which was then developed by Herbert Spencer who compared and sought the similarity between people and organisms.

Durkheim believed that people are a structure consisting of several interrelated parts. Each has certain interdependency and functions. Those different functions do not make the system chaotic instead they can make the system balanced. Those parts are interdependent and have a functional character. Therefore, if there is a malfunction part, it can damage the system balance.

The people's holistic characteristic is associated with the functions of their elements, such as norms, customs, traditions, and institutions available in the community. According to Durkheim, ideas, values, norms, beliefs, and the ideology of a certain culture are concrete expressions of collective awareness or social ties for people. Collective awareness outside an individual is the element for controlling human wishes and interests.

Lamaholot rite is basically people's collective awareness and social ties. Inside the rite is found ideas, values, beliefs, and the philosophy of life of Lamaholot people. When it reaches the maximum level and fully covers all people's awareness in a community, in Durkheim's view, an organic solidarity is born. It is a type of solidarity that causes job distribution from individual cooperation in a system. This system considers people and each individual as the community's organ. This organic solidarity demands an interaction of each part for the sake of a totality (Durkheim 2015).

This structural functionalism theory is more normative as it always considers people's possibility to be a harmonious, stable, and well-established condition. These theoretical

studies are considered to happen and be valid in a certain community and at a certain period, so this is ahistorical. Thus, it can be said that this theory ignores the pluralistic-multicultural characters and changing phenomena in a society, such as interfamily, tribal, and village conflicts (Sanderson 2000; Poloma 1987).

Nevertheless, this theory is considered to be able to help the researchers to peruse and analyze the Lamaholot people's structure with their organic characters, consisting of interconnected parts with genealogy or kinship ties in Lamaholot. The researchers also perceived its contribution to help to answer the final objective of the study. It is the effort to develop religious moderation in which each individual and religious follower consider themselves as one community despite having differences to create a harmonious life in religious diversity.

The humans' life regularities with their wishes and interests that are well-controlled perfectly become the guarantee for social cohesion and harmony of living together. These are the last wishes of the mainstreamed idea of religious moderation whose discourses start to occur after the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs launched a book on religious moderation. Based on the Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious moderation is considered as a priority of development and a part of a cultural strategy in putting human resources forward (Kementerian Agama 2019). The Ministry of Religious Affairs defines it as a balanced religious attitude between one's religious experience and respect towards others' religious practices which have a different belief. It aims to prevent someone and a group of people from excessive, extreme, and fanatic attitudes and revolutionary attitudes in believing in a religion (Kementerian Agama 2019).

Specifically, religious moderation is more related to a culture where each believer

is expected to be willing to adapt their religious behavior and attitude to the environment and applicable cultural standards. The final goal is to create peace and social cohesion (Sihombing, Abdullah, and Prasojo 2020).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study of local culture in the frame of religious moderation was designed with a qualitative method to support the researchers' goal in exploring and analyzing the knowledge, experiences, opinions, and feelings of informants about *gemohing* praxis. The researchers approached the research objects from anthropological and sociological perspectives. It is to explore the relevance, purpose and benefits of this research after examining and treating field data according to their existence, nature, and quality as they are from an emic point of view (Ratna 2010). Meanwhile, from a sociological perspective, the focus was on the interaction between religion and society (Northcott 2002). With these two perspectives, a comprehensive understanding of social structures, interactions and phenomena was obtained (Northcott 2020). The researchers focused on the mutually-influencing relationship between local culture and the life practice of its adherents (Abidah 2017).

The research was conducted in three villages in Larantuka city in East Flores Mainland, namely Waihali, Puken Tobi Wangi Bao and Sarotari villages, two villages in Witihama sub-district on Adonara Island, namely Balaweling and Pledo and two villages in East Adonara sub-district on Adonara Island, namely Lelenbala and Ipi Ebang. These locations were chosen because they were seen as multi-religious areas that still practiced the *gemohing* tradition faithfully to this day. Primary data were collected through observation and interviews with key informants,

namely 23 cultural figures and residents of the *gemohing* tradition. They play a role as tribal chiefs, religious and public figures, females, and youths who live in Larantuka city and Adonara Island. The practice of *gemohing* that appeared in religious celebrations, marriage, death, and tradition rites is the main object of this study. Meanwhile, secondary data were collected through references related to the research theme and audio-visual in the form of documentaries and document studies. Data were collected for two years from September 2019 to June 2022. The focus of the questions in the interview was on knowledge, experience, opinions and feelings about the *gemohing* practice. All collected data were classified, compared, and interpreted. Data interpretation refers to the process of using diverse analytical methods to review data and arrive at relevant conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Lamaholot People, East Flores, on Mankind

The concept of humans from the Lamaholot perspective is relevant to a study on *Gemohing* Lamaholot as a foundation for building the Gembong activities. In Lamaholot language, a human is called as *atadiken*, meaning a good person (*Ata* means people, while *diken* means good). Lamaholot people believe that a human is born from a couple of good husband and wife who have good life habits and will consistently become good people for their entire life. To state this opinion, Lamaholot people have a quote stating that “*ata budi dike onen senaren, ata nulun dike walen senaren*” (Kean 2008). Besides *atadiken*, there is *atadaten* (bad people) or wicked people who think and behave immorally. Their presence is always tempting and disrupts *atadiken*.

Lamaholot people believe that they and their fellows are God's creatures and feel superior

to other creatures. They mention it using an expression stating that *Ana ihiken selaka, one (bai) woraken belaon, atau ihih woraken lodan, kulit kamaken belaon* (human dignity and standards are like gold and diamond). As noble creatures, Lamaholot people also believe that they and their fellows are brothers and sisters from the same father and mother (*ina tou, ama ehan*) and then classified into a certain ethnic, village, and the like.

In Lamaholot people's perspective, human is separated by soul and spirit (*tuber manger* or *tube mange*) and the skin (*kamak*) or the body (*kakoh*). When death comes to take someone's life away, *tuber-mange* will be separated from the *kamak/kakoh* (Arndt 2003). *Tuber-mange* will move to another world or afterlife which is known as *lau wato tonu, lau kajo bala* (Kean 2008). The afterlife is considered the same as the worldly life and perceived as the continuation of the worldly life, including jobs and habits that are usually done by someone when he/she is alive. Therefore, during the funeral process, all of the people's belongings are buried along with them, such as their equipment used for working (*parang/machete, tofa* (a type of knife), spear, arch, and arrow) and fishing equipment for men and weaving equipment for women. The clothes they use for working are also buried along with them and their cutlery, such as plates, glasses, and spoons.

When separating from *kamak/kakoh tuber-mange*, they will go to one of two places based on their good and bad deeds done by the owner of *tuber-mange* (Kean 2008). People, during their life, who behave well, their *tuber-mange* go to a fully happiness world. Meanwhile, people, during their life, who have bad deeds, their *tuber-mange* will roam the earth. The spirits who had no chance to enjoy their happiness usually roam during dreams or disturbances experienced by their family members. To explain the

interpretation of those dreams or disturbances, *atamuan* or *atamolan* are usually asked to do so. *Atamuan* or *atamolan* also plays a role as the leader of a soul retrieval ceremony to make the spirits go to a happiness world.

The Lamaholot people consider their fellows as brothers/sisters who come from the same father and mother (*ina tou ama ehan*). In this perception, the unity becomes the most dominant aspect. The brotherhood that binds the relationship between Lamaholot people is extremely strong. This can be shown in a phrase stating that *eket nope tapo tonu-welak nope jin jawa, puin taan uin ehan-gehan taan kahan olon, puna dike nopa tupat-liput sare mopo rorit* (or *tite ata kakan arin tale kebote, edo dike reuk sare*). Being united as brothers/sisters is perceived more if the Lamaholot people are far away from their hometown. This unity can be seen from an expression stating that *tite ata koli lolon hena* (we come from the same source). The sense of unity is realized in mutual cooperation (helping each other), particularly when helping needy people. The advice for those who are working far from the hometown is *ola ehin kae peten noo peni umenen, here wain kae menu hukut noon laba lamaken* or *ola ehin here wain pao gotak kriden kenukan, tekan taan gike ukun tenu taan lobon (luan)* (Kean 2008). It means that all people's hard work should be intended for the family interest and *lewotana*, and never be extravagant when staying far away from the hometown. In the daily life, helping behavior is also done by accomplishing job duties when some tasks could not be finished by an individual. The group activities are known as *gemohing, julun* or *kampo tangan*.

In the context of celebrating a party or an event that requires people to eat and drink, mutual cooperation in that context is known as *talin* or *kumpu kao*. Each family brings or gives their portions to help needy people who are

holding a party. In the framework of unity, the Lamaholot people take betel nuts as the symbol. In each opportunity and any kind of matter, the activity of betel nuts chewing becomes a part in the beginning. For customary affairs, the betel nut treat of *Gili bolak* ceremony is performed by the ethnic leader.

The purpose of *Gili bolak* is to beg for the presence of ancestors to help and bless this ritual. The order of this *Gili bolak* ceremony is as follows: *Firstly*, the nickname of the ethnic leader to bring all involved elements together and beg for the presence of ancestors. *Secondly*, *bau lolon* or serving drinks for ancestors, and then it is continued by all people who attend the ceremony consecutively based on the customary status in the community. *Thirdly*, it is followed by the Betel-nut treat. Those who cannot chew betel-nuts just need to touch the plate with betel-nuts on it.

Before the activities are performed, it needs to plan and determine together through a discussion led by the ethnic leader at *lango suku*. Meanwhile, the discussion among village groups is led by *kebelen lewo* and held in a traditional house owned by a village (*lango belen*). In Lamaholot language, this type of activity is known as *pupu oneket ani kirin* (Kean 2008).

The ethnic community of Lamaholot is integrated into tribes. Heterogeneous Lamaholot tribes and *lewo* (villages) where one tribe consists of Lamaholot Muslims and Lamaholot Christians have an organic character. Each tribe has its role and function. These tribes are led by tribal chiefs and tribal chiefs are led by a chief called *belen lewo* or village head (both from among Muslims and Catholics based on lineage). If communal rituals are performed, the tribal and village structures have a role in constructing the communal ritual. The tribal and *lewo* structures are built on genealogical kinship ties. Such kinship does not

exhibit absolute segregation between Lamaholot Muslims and Catholics. The bond is so tightly-knit and becomes a strengthening instrument of its organic unity as a unitary human community (ummah) and its cohesive character at the tribal, village (lewo) and inter-lewo level (Francis and Al-Tayyeb 2019).

The characteristics of the Lamaholot culture are as follows: *First*, language. It is called the Lamaholot language. In East Flores Regency, the Lamaholot language is the daily language of the people who inhabit Adonara Island, Solor Island and parts of the mainland of East Flores. Urban communities use the Malay language. This differs from the language used in traditional ceremonies and Lamaholot rites. Traditional and ritual language has metaphor-symbolic elements that contain sacred values. Therefore, the meaning is not immediately apparent but must be searched for. This type of language is not used by all residents of Lamaholot but by certain figures such as customary priests (called *atamua*) and the *Kabelen Lewo* (traditional elders of lewo-village). It is believed that only with the guidance of their ancestors that they can speak in this language (Bebe 2018).

Taum in their study of the Lamaholot language through *Kisah Wato Wele-Lia Nurat Dalam Tradisi Puisi Lisan Flores Timur* shows that a variety of oral literature called *tutu maring* or *tutu koda* (story, narrative) is still in prevalent circulation among the people of East Flores (Taum 1997). *Tutu koda* consists of several subtypes namely *tutu usu maring asa* (origin story) (Hurit 2015), *tani tutu tani maring* (stories expressed in tears, for example, death events), *opak bleun* (stories told through songs), *uri selen* (lyric prose stories), and *dolo-dolo* (rhymes sung to accompany a dance called Tandak). Taum wrote that in essence, *tutu maring* is a ritual language (or so-called *koda knalan*-the language of the old people). In its development, these stories are told

with the *koda Lamaholot* which is the regional language of East Flores presented orally in the form of poetry (Taum 1997).

Second, social system or social organization. Some rural areas, especially on Adonara Island, Solor Island and several villages on the mainland of East Flores designate *koke bale* (*uli beliwo*) the center of villages (lewo). It is believed to be the meeting place with the highest being, *Lera Wulan Tana Ekan*. With that, the people of Lamaholot make *korke* the center of their religious life. Now, such *koke bale* role has shifted to places of worship of world religions such as chapels, churches, and mosques. However, the existence of *koke bale* is still maintained. The ancestral rites of the Lamaholot are still centered on the *koke bale*.

Koke bale plays more of a role as the center of people's social life. It becomes a strategic place, where all important decisions related to lifestyle, customary systems and Lamaholot future are talked, discussed, and decided. It became the center of the village, where the whole community gathered for deliberation. It is a source of strength for all members of the community, whether inside or outside the village or in overseas places (Vatter 1984).

The Lamaholot social system of East Flores can also be observed from the customary marriage system. Lamaholot marriage is not just kinship formation and ties. For the Lamaholot community, marriage is not only a moment of binding physical and spiritual relationships to form a happy family of two people (male and female) but also a bond between two large tribal families or clans. A marriage creates a relationship between the female giver (*blake* or *opu lake*) and the female recipient (*opu* or *opu bine*). This condition supports the structure of a harmonious society as initiated by structural functionalism.

Third, the livelihood system. Agriculture

is the main living of the Lamaholot community. The hilly natural conditions and the lack of reliable water sources have made the Lamaholot community choose the field farmers. Areas with river flows that allow rice fields are only found in Konga (in Titehena Sub-District) and Wureh (in West Adonara Sub-District).

The choice of life as fishermen is taken by the Lamaholot people who live on the coast, such as Lamahala, Lamalera, Lohayong, while other coastal residents go to the sea as an additional livelihood. Today, with various technological advances in the marine sector, many people make fishing as their main livelihood. Another additional livelihood is hunting, though people are starting to abandon it due to the increasing scarcity of game animals and shrinking hunting areas.

There is a striking difference between the farming system in ancient and present. Today, everyone works their land and grows all kinds of long-lived crops. They own the field of cultivation. In ancient times, a farming system with shifting fields was used. The work was carried out by the entire village community in a large area or expanse called *etang* or *uar*. Within the area there were plots of land called *newa*, each of which was worked by two to four or more people, commonly known as *keneu*.

Two things make this shifting farming system possible. *First*, there were not enough people while the land was vast. Work on shifting fields was usually carried out by villages whose populations were fairly small but owned a large area of land. Due to the vastness of the land, people freely moved from one land to another. *Second*, long-lived plants were not yet known. People were not familiar with the types of long-lived plants; thus, the fields were often abandoned. In the past, people only knew rice, corn, and barley (food crops); thus, after the harvest there was

nothing to maintain anymore.

In order to increase field yields as expected, there are a number of factors (internal and external) on which farmers rely, including adequate and regular rainfall, good crop maintenance and prevention of pests and diseases and other factors. To support these factors, Lamaholot farmers carry out agricultural rites while working on agricultural land starting from the beginning until the harvest. Rites are performed at every stage in agriculture according to the Lamaholot community system.

Fourth, art system. Lamaholot arts are manifested in several forms. First, the architecture of the traditional house (*koke bale*: a cottage-shaped house; has four-six-eight pillars; in the middle there is a seat-*bale-kenatan*-as a place of deliberation, asking and giving thanks to the highest being, storing offerings and heirlooms (Bebe 2018). Second, dances (*hedung-war* dances, *sole*, *oha*, *lili*, *na'ma*, *lebe*, *beku*, *gawi au*, *soka*, *sele* and *tena rere*). Third, ikat. Fourth, games (including *keso*, *kote-gasing*, *singgolo*, *tada*, *lusi kepa puhu*, *kemoti*, *mukomoron* (Bebe 2018; BPS Kabupaten Flores Timur 2021).

Fifth, the religious system. There are currently four major religions in East Flores, namely Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Hinduism (Catholicism 179.120; Islam 60.146; Christian 3.011 and Hinduism 125). The indigenous people of Lamaholot, especially those who are now Catholic and Muslim, are also seen as a group of people who remain faithful to the religious practices of their ancestors.

The Meaning and Expression of Gemohing in Lamaholot Community Social Life

Gemohing is a mutual activity in the Lamaholot community of East Flores. This practice aims to help certain individuals and

society in general who are experiencing an event, such as grief, marriage, and work that requires intervention from other parties. At first, *gemohing* was closely related to affairs in the field or garden, such as creating new lands, planting, cleaning and harvesting. In subsequent developments, *gemohing* expanded its reach from agricultural affairs to social affairs such as building houses of worship, death, marriage and religious celebrations. In the context of this expansion, other terms with same meaning as *gemohing* have emerged, namely tulun tali, pohe gemore for the people of Adonara Island, and *tulung tambah* and *ba muka* for the Larantuka people.

In the researchers' observation, when Muslims build mosques, people of other religions such as Catholics and Protestants take part in the process. Likewise, when Catholics or Protestants build churches, Muslims help. One interesting thing is that when a church or mosque is inaugurated, all communities, including Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and others, come with contributions, usually in the form of consumer goods such as rice, coffee, sugar, and animals. This involvement is a socio-religious expression that signifies that a mosque or church is a common property that must be built and maintained. The symbolic language of the expression 'church and mosque are common property' is interpreted concretely in concrete actions, namely maintaining kinship with each other regardless of religion. One expression that becomes the glue of togetherness and kinship which is then manifested in *gemohing* is that *your happiness is our happiness, your distress is our distress*.

CIG Record documentation (2005) about the fifth anniversary of the presence of Catholicism in Larantuka on October 5, 2005 demonstrates one of the Lamaholot social morals. The celebration of this Catholic religious

ritual is the pride and property of all religious people. Muslims from an area in East Flores called Kampung Baru did *gemohing* (*talin, tulung tambah, ba muka*) en masse. They brought rice, coffee, sugar, and donated five cows to Larantuka Diocese to celebrate the five centuries. Likewise, in Witihama, Muslims held *talin* by bringing basic necessities including animals as shared consumption during the celebration of the dedication of church building.

In the researchers' observation, it was also found that *gemohing* is evident in the customs of the Lamaholot community when there is an ordination ceremony to the pick-up and implementation of the inaugural eucharist of a Catholic priest and dedication of a church. At this moment, every local people took a day off from their job and joined in the celebration in joy and merriment. Catholics along with Muslims melt together in dance and song. The basic principle is the common ownership of religious celebrations and the like, such as a Catholic priest, church building or mosque. Likewise, when Muslims have finished performing the Hajj, they are picked up and paraded when they return to their hometowns by the community as an expression of gratitude and pride that a Hajj has been born from among the community. Just like Catholic priests, this asserts that a pilgrim does not only belong to Muslims but belongs to all members of society.

Another annual celebration in which *gemohing* practiced can be seen on religious holiday celebration. Before the Christmas celebration ended, all Muslims were waiting at the door of the church to wish them a merry Christmas. Similarly, Catholics line up in front of the mosque to congratulate Eid Al-Fitr after the Eid prayer, emphasizing that the celebration was a joint celebration of the people of the Lamaholot community of East Flores. Public testimonies about this are as follows:

"In Larantuka we call it kumpo kao tulung tambah. It means that we help others who are holding events by collecting money or goods such as rice, corn and other goods as much as we can" (R1. Sunday, May 15, 2022).

"I am a Catholic living next door to another religion. We build communication, greet each other and even share food such as corn, fish, vegetables, and fruits" (R2. Thursday, May 5, 2022).

"We live side by side with other religions and we greet each other, work together to build the environment in mutual cooperation such as cleaning the environment at the KBG, neighborhood and parish levels. Any activities always involve other religions in the Senhora Lajari Gege environment as brothers and sisters" (R3. Wednesday, May 4, 2022).

"As a Muslim who is a minority I build communication, greet each other and work hand in hand when there are activities, whether formed by Catholicism, Protestantism or other religions. When I celebrate Eid al-Fitr, I invite Catholic neighbors to come to my house. It has become a tradition to carry out gatherings during religious holidays" (R4. Saturday, May 7, 2022).

"At Christmas and New Year, I always invite Muslim brothers and sisters who are my neighbors. In addition, we also involve people of other religions when there are religious celebrations or activities as well as traditional celebrations, for example, asking for help in cooking for religious celebrations, new welcoming parties, wedding parties and traditional celebrations. They are given a special place, special spices to a place to eat in a tent and given the opportunity to give greetings, messages and impressions in living together in our environment" (R5. Thursday, May 5, 2022).

"As Muslims who incidentally are a minority religion in Larantuka, I certainly need to interact with other religions, communicate with each other in daily interactions regardless of religious differences. Personally, I feel support from people of other religions during the month of Ramadan (the month of Fasting). The forms of support from other religions include a calm, comfortable situation, language (spoken) and attitude" (R6. Friday, May 6, 2022).

"As a Muslim, I do not close myself to other religious people, especially Catholics in this city. In

our daily life we greet each other and take part in traditional cultural rituals and other activities" (R7. Friday, May 6, 2022).

The researchers found that the strong foundation of *gemohing* ritual is the Lamaholot philosophy of humanity. First, *budi dike akal sare* (good manners (kind-hearted), wise, and considerate) or *budi dike onen senaren* (good manners, kindhearted). God created humans as good people, people who have reason and civility. Therefore, Lamaholot people are expected to be kind and polite to others.

Second, *pupu taan tou gahan taan ehan* (Gathering in a strong (solid) unity) or *puin taan uin tou gahan taan kahan ehan* (Gathering in a unity of heart and mind). Lamaholot people at every opportunity always feel like one family as *ina tou ama ehang* which is usually called *tite ata koli lolon hena* (All of us are one alliance). Likewise, in all ritual activities and celebrations, they are always united in the form of *tulun tali*, *pohe gemore* (helping each other selflessly) which was later popularized by the name *gemohing*. *Gemohing* shows the togetherness and unity of the community while simultaneously affirming its social side that Lamaholot humans cannot live alone without other people and need other people to affirm their existence.

Third, *lewohana baka wala nin lagan duli pali* (hometown and an overlay of plantation). God created nature and everything in it for human use. All creation, both humans and flora and fauna have the right to use this nature to meet their need and prosperity. As a form of gratitude toward God, humans must maintain and care for this nature so that it remains sustainable. Some of the results of human labor must be offered to God through the poor and abandoned children.

This life philosophy of the Lamaholot people is considered as sacred values because it is the basis of all the rules that apply in the Lamaholot

society to this day. According to the researchers, one of the values indicated by *gemohing* of lamaholot is solidarity as described by Durkheim. These values are the worldview and personality of the Lamaholot community which are still maintained and preserved. This life philosophy forms the basis of community relations and becomes a supporting factor for social harmony as initiated by Durkheim. In a more specific context, this philosophy can also be seen as promoting values to the idealism of religious moderation in Indonesia. Additionally, the solidarity of the *gemohing* of Lamaholot is the underlying spirit for the idea of religious moderation.

Gemohing and Religious Moderation in Indonesia

The spirit of unity in diversity is vividly apparent in the daily life of the Lamaholot people, East Flores, East Nusa Tenggara. The Lamaholor values underpinning the spirit is *pupu taan tou gahan taan ehan* or *puin taan uin tou gahan taan kahan ehan* (unity) and *ina tou ama ehang*. These values may be considered as the foundation of religious life in East Flores, strengthening the pattern of relations of religious diversity and becoming an element that frames the teachings and religious values of its adherents (Wijayatsih, Prabowo, and Rimukti 2010).

Informant 8 emphasized that the culture of life of the Lamaholot community was formed by their ancestors and became part of their life history. Historical formations are transmitted through the ancestral *koda* (words).

"Koda has remained and continues to be maintained to this day" (R8. Tuesday, September 10, 2019).

"We live in religious diversity, but we came from one common ancestor. One God, one grandmother, one nature" (R9. Friday, October 4, 2019).

"We as the current generation practice faithfully the koda (words, sabda) of our ancestors. We are united by the koda. It is the power that unites us" (R10. Tuesday, September 10, 2019).

"I view religious values and content as similar to cultural customs because they regulate human behavior. Religion and custom work under their respective rules. There's only one goal, which is God" (R11. Friday, October 4, 2019).

"The local culture of Lamaholot is very supportive of religions because it teaches people to do good by everyone. It's similar to religions that constantly preach peace to all " (R12. Thursday, November 14, 2019).

From the description above, the researchers found that the people of East Flores are inclusive and open to differences. The characteristic was born from the principle upheld by them, *ina tou ama ehan*. According to informants 13 and 14, this principle mandates that every citizen sees each other as brothers who come from the same father and mother (*ina tou ama ehan*) (R13. Tuesday, September 10, 2019; R14. Saturday, June 4, 2022). In this view, unity and oneness are highly highlighted. The ties of brotherhood that bind Lamaholot's human relations are very strong. This is evident from the expression: *eket nope tapo tonu-welak nope jin jawa, puin taan uin ehan-gehan taan kahan olon, puna dike nopa tupat-liput sare mopo rorit* (being united strongly in one union and gathering in one integrated place). Brotherhood unity is felt more strongly when the Lamaholot people are in overseas places far from their hometowns (Atasoge, Husein, and Masruri 2022). This unity is evident in the saying: *tite ata koli lolon hena* (we come from the same source). In the view of informant 15, the Muslim community of East Flores started when *ata kiwang* (a general term for the mountainous East Flores community of all ethnicities, groups and religious backgrounds) came down from the mountain and met with

Gujarat traders and listened to their preaching and followed suit. “*So, when they came down from the mountain and saw for the first time the Quran brought by Gujarat traders and followed it, that’s when Islam started to live in East Flores.*” (*R15. Tuesday, October 22, 2019 and Monday, February 17, 2020*).

This sense of unity is manifested in mutual help, especially in time of need. The given advice is *ola ehin kae peten noo peni umenen, here wain kae hukut menu noon laba lamaken* (when harvesting crops and the result of hardworking behavior are overload in a storage, and remember to share them with your relatives) or *ola ehin here wain pao gotak kriden kenukan, tekan taan gike ukun tenu taan lobon luan* (when harvesting crops and the result of hardworking behavior are overload in storage, share them with orphans; eating and drinking will be tastier if there is a spirit of sharing; eating and drinking in a happy situation) (Kean 2008:16). The point is that all the results of human labor must be devoted to the interests of the family and *lewotana* and should not live lavishly in overseas lands. In daily life, mutual help is manifested in *gemohing*.

Furthermore, such a reality is supported by the communal character of the people. According to informants 16 and 17, the people of Lamaholot are communal in nature. This characteristic is evident during, among others, a death event. The death of one person is a sorrow for all and it gives rise to a feeling of oneness in the individuals. This feeling moves others to take part in the mourning of one family. They take a day off or two and come to the mourning tent to do anything they can. The sense of unity is driven by the *gemohing* praxis with the principle of *ina tou ama ehan* philosophy (*R16. Monday, October 28, 2019; R17. Wednesday, February 17, 2020*). The same thing was also expressed by informant 18. According to them, through *gemohing* the people merge into one and differences in religious backgrounds do

not stop them from gathering (*R18. Wednesday, June 1, 2022*).

However, the land of Lamaholot in East Flores is not free from local conflicts. On March 7 and March 9, 2010, there was a social conflict between the residents of Horowura Village (Catholic Village) and Lamahala Village (Muslim Village) in East Adonara Sub-District, East Flores Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. It happened because of a dispute over village boundaries. There were no victims in the conflict. 12 people (10 people were treated at the Larantuka Hospital and 2 people were treated at the Maumere Hospital) were severely injured and 21 people suffered minor injuries and were treated at the Waiwerang Health Center (Pusat Krisis Kemenkes 2010). The conflict between two village communities with different religions in East Flores also occurred in 2013. It occurred in Lohayong Village (Muslim Village) and Wulublolong Village (Catholic Village) in East Solor Sub-District, Solor Island. Clashes between residents of these two villages killed three people and injured seven people. It also resulted in 131 houses being burned and 112 family heads forced to evacuate. It was caused by the border dispute between the two villages (Indonesia Student, 2022). Even though they occurred on a small scale, these conflicts may still be repeated in the future. However, this study aimed to show that the local culture of the Lamaholot community of East Flores has existential power as weavers of social cohesion of religious communities in East Flores Regency, East Nusa Tenggara.

Up to this point, it can be said that long before religious moderation was promoted and became mainstream in Indonesia, the Lamaholot people of East Flores have practiced it through their local culture, *gemohing*. One of the supporting factors to this reality is the transmission of the principles and values of local culture in the life praxis of the people of East Flores. In a more

specific domain, *gemohing* as part of the cultural wealth of the Lamaholot community can be seen as the foundation and pillar of their shared life to this day.

This local culture also supports and strengthens the religious teachings adopted by the bearers of the Lamaholot culture. Informants 19, 20 and 21 claimed that the Lamaholot local culture cannot be separated from religious teachings and both are needed in a ritual as well as in religious and cultural activities in East Flores (*R19, R20, R21. Tuesday, November 12, 2019*). Meanwhile, in informant 22's view: "*As a child of Adonara I will not give up my customs. Likewise, I as a believer still have the religion that I follow. Because in my life, customs (local culture) and religion must go hand in hand for the sake of peace and happiness living with my extended family.*" (*R22. Tuesday, November 12, 2019*). Similarly, informant 23 stated that among the Lamaholot people there is a habit of aligning or juxtaposing traditional rituals with religious values. In both there are elements of salvation. That is, local culture such as traditional rituals are carried out for safety and religion also offers a way of salvation for its adherents. On the other hand, according to them, there are still a handful of people who are still very radical in their ancestral religion and seem irreligious. From the Church side, it appears that several Church communities have started to combine religious celebrations with local wisdom, for example, the ritual of giving offerings to the ancestors and inviting fellow believers of other religions to participate in the celebration. The intention behind this ritual act is the hope of safety for all residents of the house and maintaining brotherly ties among family members of different religious backgrounds (*R23. Monday, October 7, 2019*).

Religious moderation means a middle perspective, attitude and behaviour. It requires to always act fairly and to avoid extremism in

religion. A fair and balanced attitude is the basic principle of religious moderation in addition to tolerance, egalitarianism, deliberation, straightness, and firmness (Kementerian Agama RI 2019). From this perspective, religious moderation is the key to create a climate of tolerance and harmony in life between different religious people. This perspective is a middle way to keep religious adherents from extremism and bigotry. With it, religious moderation is understood as a balancing act between practicing one's own religion and respecting the practices of other religions (Sihombing, Abdullah, and Prasojo 2020).

The idealism of religious moderation, which is the creation of religious harmony as a result of the realization of a balanced religious way between the practice of one's religion and respect for the religious practices of others, has been started by the Lamaholot people of East Flores. Consistency in the principles and values of their local culture contributes to religious harmony in this region in particular and NTT in general. Harmony refers to the formulation contained in the Joint Ministerial Regulation (PBM) of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs Number 9 of 2006/8 of 2006, namely: "Relations among religious communities based on tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, and appreciation; equality in the practice of their religious teachings and; cooperation in the life of society, nation and state within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia."

Reports on the Religious Harmony Index in Indonesia published by the Research and Development of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2021 placed East Nusa Tenggara in the first place as the province with the highest level of religious harmony in Indonesia. This result supports the survey results of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Thus, the realization of religious moderation in people's lives is one of the positive impacts of the *gemohing* praxis.

Implications for the Indonesian Nation

Gemohing of Lamaholot of East Flores solidifies two religious moderation pillars in Indonesia. First, behavioral moderation. In this context, local cultures contribute to moderate religious practices, not extreme in practicing religions but open to acknowledging and respecting others who are different. According to the researchers, the Lamaholot local culture paves the way for the establishment of a dialogue model with a syncretic-reciprocal approach (Hidayat and Gaus 1998). This model presupposes openness and willingness to share the religious experiences of each party and the attitude of acceptance and recognition of others. On this side, *gemohing* is a way and a model in seeking interreligious and interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. The interreligious dialogue is intended as a dialogue related to religious institutions undertaken by people of different religions directly or indirectly. While the inter-faith dialogue is intended as a dialogue undertaken by the faithful both personally and communally (Banawiratma and Bagir 2020).

Second, movement moderation. It is oriented to an invitation to do good and stay away from the evil which leads to unity and the common good. In the context of religious pluralism, the Lamaholot local culture can be seen as the foundation to foster religious moderation. Here, local cultures bind the socio-religious relations of religious communities in East Flores. In East Flores Lamaholot, 'I' (the Catholics or Muslims) and 'others' (the Muslims or Catholics) are two entities united by the principles and values of their local culture. In the face of an ever-changing world and paradigm shifts, there will always be the possibility that the religious community in East Flores will fall into

one of the seismic faults that cut the world into 'I-You' (Christian-Catholic-Islamic; Islamic-Non-Islamic) fragments with their respective interests (Steenbrink 2004; Fachrudin and Pary 2017). Efforts to revive the principles and values of local culture as well as spirituality and religious values that have been embraced are one way to face these socio-religious seismic challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study found that praxis in the communal living of East Flores people, which is actualized in *Gemohing* can be made as a foundation and pillar of an effort to embed values and principles of religious moderation in Indonesia, particularly in East Nusa Tenggara. *Gemohing* unites different individuals, communities, and institutions in one goal, namely helping community members regardless of their religious or ethnic background. *Gemohing* is manifested in material assistance and physical participation with presence in events such as the construction of houses of worship, celebrations of thanksgiving, and mourning events. They are all given voluntarily without intervention from any party. The chief factor that drives the *gemohing* praxis is the Lamaholot community's view of humanity summarized in the principles of *ina tou ama ehang* and *puin taan uin tou gahan taan kahan ehan*. This principle bridges social relations and strengthens the bonds of unity among the Lamaholot community. These views and principles become the basis and foundation for mainstreaming religious moderation in the context of the Lamaholot community. At this point, Lamaholot *gemohing* contributes to the effort of creating life harmony and religious moderation in the context of Indonesian pluralism. It can happen through the *Gemohing* praxis among East Flores people who actualize the principle of religious moderation, such as common virtue, fairness, patriotism,

tolerance, and anti-violence.

Based on the results of this study, the researchers recommend the following two things for further studies. First, it is necessary to study further the practice of *gemohing* among the Lamaholot people of East Flores in diaspora areas outside the East Flores region, including in overseas areas. Second, further studies are needed on shifts in meaning and changes in the expression of *gemohing* from time to time and the factors that cause them.

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